Volume I.
Number 3.

Week of
June 10, 1940

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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† Love for Love opened last Monday, June 3rd, at the Hudson Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.

† Walk With Music opened last Tuesday, June 4th, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.

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"Walk With Music"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *June 5, 1940*

Walk With Music Pleasant Evening's Entertainment

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

AFTER many vicissitudes, revisions and cast changes, the musical comedy now called Walk with Music reached Broadway last night under the auspices of Ruth Selwyn and the Messrs. Shubert, to provide another lively addition to our already notable list of good summer musicals.

Perhaps because Walk with Music is based on a comedy written by Stephen Powys, it can boast a book that tells a more detailed and logical story than the majority of modern musicals. It has a definite plot, of the Cinderella variety, and a pleasant one at that—all about three young girls who went out to seek three rich husbands and how they succeeded.

This provided a background, then, for the singing and dancing of some 18 semi-stars and nearly all the chorus girls in town who didn't get into the American Jubilee or who didn't know how to swim. It was somewhat surprising, at that, to find so many good looking ones who hadn't been snared by Billy Rose or his chief competitor, the World's Fair.

The three husband hunters were Kitty Carlisle, attractive in voice and personality; Mitzi Green, one-time enfant terrible of the movies, and Betty Lawford, who achieved some fame a couple of seasons ago as the bathtub girl in The Women. Playing opposite them were the always personable, graceful and competent Jack Whiting, Marty May, who has a smooth comedy style, and Art Jarrett, the orchestra leader who has been reformed into an actor and who is doing very well at it.

* * *

That is not all. Frances Williams is seen as a cynical and sophisticated society woman of uncertain morals, and Stepin Fetchit drawls and shuffles his way through several comedy scenes.

There is little distinctive about the music, but it swings along in the modern manner, with melody sacrificed for the most part to rhythm. Nevertheless there are some good numbers in it (you have already heard some of them) such as Ooh, What You Said, which turned out to be the evening's triumph for Mitzi Green, and the theme song, I Walk With Music.

Incidentally, the dance number following Miss Green's singing of Ooh, What You Said brought the loudest applause of the evening for a young man named Ted Gary, an amazingly agile stepper who was first seen here in Babes in Arms, and who is entitled to greater opportunities. We should see more of him.

* * *

A team of dance satirists calling themselves Alice Dudley and Kenneth Bostock are also making their debut in Walk with Music, and to them this department also extends its compliments. They are clever comedians in dance, and some day they may be as great as the Hartmans, which is to say that they will have reached the pinnacle. They, like Mr. Gary, should be given more to do.

Miss Green does only three perfunctory imitations, including one of Garbo, a particularly biting one of Hepburn and one of Baby Snooks, but these are thrown in, I expect, as a sop to those who have heard that imitations are her forte. In her straight comedy she is sound and shows the poise and stage manner of experience. Her advanced age of 19 has not bowed her down perceptibly.

Mr. Whiting breezes through the comedy with his accustomed charm and it is always a delight to see him work.

There is nothing extraordinary about Walk with Music, but it provides a pleasant evening. And it is as clean as a cake of cellophane-wrapped soap.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *June 5, 1940*

"Walk With Music" Comes to the Ethel Barrymore

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT IS almost as hard to find anything to say about "Walk With Music" as it is to find anything to say for it. The records will tell you it it the same musical comedy which, under the name of "Three After Three" and with Simone Simon as its star, encountered its understandable difficulties while touring earlier this season. There is one thing, however, the records do not make clear. That is why anyone, after closing it, should have believed in it to the extent of rewriting, recasting, and rechristening it to bring it in.

It is all about three sisters who desert their chicken farm in New Hampshire and journey to Florida and Havana in search of a millionaire husband. They draw lots to see which one of them, on their small capital, is to pretend to be glamour girl, which the chaperon, and which the maid. That is their little game of strategy.

In other words, "Walk With Music" has a plot—oh, acres of plot. It has dialogue, some of it supposed to be funny. It has scenery, and costumes, and music, and lyrics, and hardworking choruses. It has its principals, too—Kitty Carlisle, Mitzi Green, Jack Whiting, Frances Williams, Betty Lawford, Art Jarrett, and Marty May, all of whom refused to be downed either by the heat or their material at the Ethel Barrymore last evening and managed to match their industry with their cheerfulness.

If some of us were more easily daunted than these valiant performers; if some of us began to suspect the applause we heard must be coming from friends and backers assembled in another theatre; and if the evening is one we shall long remember as being a chore rather than an entertainment, we must confess we did like Alice Dudley and Kenneth Bostock when they capered as an old couple turned jitterbug in a number known as "Way Back in 1939 A. D." That was about as far as we could go toward mustering any enthusiasm. The rest had better be silence.

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"Walk With Music"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *June 5, 1940*

'Walk With Music' Opens at the Barrymore, Dragging Its Book Behind It

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAST evening's "Walk With Music," which opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theater, presents the final class of the season of 1939-1940 with a simple problem in addition and subtraction. The sufficiently numerous assets may be totaled up—Kitty Carlisle and Mitzi Green may be added together, and Jack Whiting and Betty Lawford and all the pretty chorus girls in their bright and summery costumes. One may add Frances Williams and Art Jarrett and many of the songs compiled for them to sing and the agreeable crispness of the whole production.

These virtues, and others of slightly smaller denomination, make a very pretty total. It would be pleasant to stop with that total and call "Walk With Music" an asset, but critical bookkeeping cannot always be pleasant. There is still the plot to subtract, and all the slow moments of tedium it involves and all the fretting away at wisecracks. The plot of "Walk With Music" is a grevious debit. When the books are balanced we end the evening in the red. Miss Carlisle and Mr. Whiting and their associates end it knee-deep in dialogue.

A good many authors seem to have been employed to get them there. The play is based on a comedy by Stephen Powys, and Guy Bolton, Parke Levy and Alan Lipscott seem to have conspired in the adaptation. From their laborings there emerges at least a ton of feathers and a protracted discussion of three little farm sisters from New Hampshire who go out into the big world with a little money and profitable matrimony in mind. One of the sisters pretends to be an heiress and one to be her companion and the third to be her maid. And they fall in love with the wrong men in Palm Beach and Havana and fight on to happiness through a blizzard of quips, any one of which would floor Tony Galento.

All the quips together certainly weigh heavily on "Walk With Music" and reduce its progress to a crawl. Miss Carlisle sings charmingly and Johnny Mercer and Hoagy Carmichael have given her agreeable words and music for the singing. Mr. Whiting is crisp and engaging and Miss Green is impertinently gay. Miss Williams sings a lament or two in her superior fashion and the customary dances are arranged. Tom Lee and Watson Barratt have not achieved the epochal in costumes or sets, but it is all nice enough to look at.

But much of it is, to end on a blunt note, almost intolerably tedious to listen to. Somebody will have to do something about the musical comedy book some day. We can call that unfinished business, to be taken up during the season of 1940-1941.

"WALK WITH MUSIC"

A musical comedy in two acts, based on a comedy by Stephen Powys; musical adaptation by Guy Bolton, Parke Levy and Alan Lipscott; lyrics by Johnny Mercer; music by Hoagy Carmichael; costumes by Tom Lee; settings by Watson Barratt; production under the supervision of Rowland Leigh. The cast:

Pamela Gibson	Kitty Carlisle
Rhoda Gibson	Mitzi Green
Carrie Gibson	Betty Lawford
Chesterfield	Stepin Fetchit
Henry Trowbridge	Lee Sullivan
Wing D'Hautville	Jack Whiting
Steve Harrington	Art Jarrett
Polly Van Zile	Frances Williams
Conrad Harrington	Marty May
Bellboy	Ted Gary
House Detective	Barrie O'Daniels
Stuart Hobson	William Castle

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *June 5, 1940*

"Walk With Music" Heavy With Names, Light As to Material

"Walk With Music," musical comedy by Guy Bolton, Park Levy and Alan Lipscott; music by Hoagy Carmichael. Produced by Ruth Selwyn, in association with the Messrs. Shubert at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York, June 4, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

RUTH SELWYN, being a dainty person in her own right, has seen to it that "Walk With Music," which she produced last night at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in association with the Messrs. Shubert, commands a certain daintiness of its own.

The costuming is shimmery and delicate in coloring. The dancing settings are pleasantly romantic, ranging through Florida and the Caribbean. The jokes are not too blue, even when they are on the dullish side, as they mostly are, and the music, by Hoagy Carmichael, has a pleasant lilt to fit an occasional smart lyric by Johnny Mercer.

But the story pattern, even with so old a master as Guy Bolton mixed up with it, is frayed and pointless. Even a heavy line of gifted principals can extract only a moderate amount of acceptable entertainment from it. With the competition what it is, I fear the going is going to pretty hard for "Walk With Music."

The idea originally, I gather, was to do one of those intimate musical comedies with eight girls and a love story, four boys and a comic. The plot was a comedy plot originally and used in London as "Three Blind Mice."

Trial Flights

Over here, with music added, it was first tried on tour last Fall as "Three After Three." From then on it has been subjected to a rebuilding program, with enough assistant authors called in to form a company of their own.

The story has to do with three sisters who abandon a New Hampshire chicken farm to go in search of a rich husband for one of them. The prettiest of them is to be the lure, the oldest will act as a chaperone and the youngest will be the maid.

The scheme flattens when the supposed catch falls in love with a poor but jumpy singing juvenile without a nickel. Thereafter alternate songs and dances, ensembles and solos, until closing.

Comedians and Drolls

Kitty Carlisle is the prima donna, and she one of the dependables. Mitzi Green is the pretty maid, and she with a happy following of youngsters. Jack Whiting is the juvenile, and he a juvenile with style and following.

The comedian is Marty May, a flip but pleasant fellow with an ear sensitive to dirty cracks. The noble tenor is Art Jarrett, who proceeds modestly from situation to situation, and song to song.

The specialists include Ted Gary, a dancer of sufficient individual talent to take a number away from Miss Green, even though he tried not to. And a Dudley-Bostock team that can follow where the satirical Hartmans have led and lose little by such comparisons as will be made.

Also the colored boy, Stepin Fetchit, who steps out of pictures for his first musical comedy job, and will most likely be stepping right back into pictures again soon. A droll fellow, but in need of direction.

Frances Williams is there, giving all she has to give right generously. One of her numbers is "The Rhumba Jumps," which brought on the Cuban girls and was popular. Betty Lawford fills in legitimately.

Miss Carlisle's best number appeared to be the title song, "I Walk With Music," and she did very well with Mr. Jarrett and "Wait Until You See Me in the Morning," "Break It Up, Cinderella" and "Way Back in 1939, AD," also went quite well.

There was a good deal of applause last night, which should have been encouraging.

"Walk With Music"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *June 5, 1940*

Kitty Carlisle, Mitzi Green and Frances Williams Appear in Guy Bolton's 'Walk With Music'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FIRST there was a comedy entitled "Three Blind Mice," by Stephen Powys, who is Guy Bolton in good society. Second there was a screen version of the same play entitled, of all things, "Three Blind Mice." Third and currently there is a musical version entitled "Walk With Music" and put on at the Ethel Barrymore last evening. Any logician can see that if it were not for "Three Blind Mice," "Walk With Music" would not exist.

But this is not logic. It is show business, and the truth is that "Three Blind Mice" hangs around the neck of "Walk With Music" like a stricken albatross. If it were not for the original plot, with its mechanical complications, Hoagy Carmichael's music would seem gay and tingling, and an excellent cast of talented performers could dance on tip-toe straight through it. By working industriously with a good deal of happy invention, every one concerned with "Walk With Music" has neutralized the source from which it derives. The next step would be to scrap "Three Blind Mice" and begin again. Three mice with good eyesight would be a wonderful improvement.

• • •

For nearly everything but plot is present in excellent order. Mr. Carmichael writes melody with dash and enthusiasm. Make a note of "Walk With Music" as the footlight daddy of "Ooh, What You Said," which is a song worth humming in this dark hour. "I Walk With Music," "Way Back in 1939 A. D." "Today I Am a Glamour Girl," "Break It Up, Cinderella" and "The Rumba Jumps" are songs composed for enjoyment, which is an original notion, and to most of them Johnny Mercer has fitted lyrics that are equally simple and lighthearted.

They are also well sung. Kitty Carlisle has an uncommonly lovely voice and a style that suits it perfectly. Mitzi Green, a triple-threat performer, sings, dances and acts like a professional trouper—not consuming all the enjoyment she provides, which is the hallmark of an honest giver. Although Frances Williams projects a song with so much heat that she nearly forgets to sing it, she makes "Everything Happens to Me" sound interesting, and she wrecks the theatre cooling system with "The Rumba Jumps" to the rear. Jack Whiting applies a soundly dentured baritone to the romantic ballads.

• • •

The plot works earnestly over the idea of three sisters who auction off their margin farm for $2,100 and go husband-hunting in Florida. They go a good deal farther on that sum than most visitors to the golden State of sunshine and exalted prices. Fortunately, they find a place for grinning Ted Gary to dance with pedal dexterity, and they are not above letting Dudley and Bostock insert a funny dance burlesque. Liking Stepin Fetchit is an acquired taste which this columnist has not quite mastered yet. It will have to hear the tag lines of his patter first. But Betty Lawford is easy to like on short acquaintance, and so are Lee Sullivan and Art Jarrett.

"Three Blind Mice" has done "Walk With Music" out of a good time in the theatre.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *June 5, 1940*

Finale

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE dramatic season of 1939-'40 limps rather dismally to a delayed conclusion with the arrival of the musical comedy called "Walk With Music." This is the show that had many adventures and overhaulings during a long sojourn on the road under the title of "Three After Three." In those days it offered in its leading roles the Misses Simone Simon and Mary Brian, as well as Miss Mitzi Green, who still clings to it valiantly. Now, with Miss Kitty Carlisle and Miss Betty Lawford substituting for the two former players, the show reaches town all hopefully decked out for a summer run, and I must say that it doesn't seem worth the trouble.

• • •

The chief trouble with "Walk With Music" is that it is burdened with one of the dullest and most laborious books that ever encumbered a musical comedy. The plot is all about three sisters who lost their money and decided that one of them should marry some more of it. So one of them poses as an heiress, the second as her secretary and the third as her maid, and they all set out for Palm Beach to meet some millionaires. Would it surprise you terribly if I told you that the pseudo-heiress falls in love with a poor young man and that the millionaire prefers the pseudo-maid? Of course bad musical comedy books are no new thing, but this one is not only exceptionally fatuous but insists on getting in the way with implacable insistence.

• • •

It isn't that Mr. Hoagy Carmichael's score is any masterpiece that shouldn't be interrupted, either. The music is, in fact, passably pleasant, but far from distinguished. The best air, I thought, was "Way Back in 1939 A. D.," which already has had quite a radio run. But even if you are harder on the score than I would ever think of being, you must confess that it is most agreeable as a relief from that book. It strikes me that neither the dancing nor the production is especially startling, and, although a comedy dance team called Dudley and Bostock was extremely popular among the first-nighters, I was able to maintain my calm without much difficulty.

• • •

Miss Carlisle, Miss Green and Miss Lawford are pleasant and talented young performers and it is comforting to watch them, but "Walk With Music" is too much for them. Jack Whiting and Art Jarrett at least labor manfully as the young men of the fable, and Miss Frances Williams shows that she still can put over a song effectively. I am afraid I am not an enthusiast about the art of Stepin Fetchit, the lethargic Negro clown, but he is quite a wonderworker, compared to the other comedians in the show. It might be a good idea if Bobby Clark, who hasn't enough to do in the revival of "Love for Love," were rushed over from the Hudson Theater to supply a bit of hilarity. Anyway, "Walk With Music" may conceivably be remembered as the show in which the pretty young daughter of Ward Morehouse, the columnist and playwright, makes her debut in the chorus under the name of Ruth Maitland. I trust there will be a dramatic season of 1940-'41.

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"Love for Love"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *June 4, 1940*

Congreve's 'Love for Love' Is Revived by the Players at the Hudson

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE Players proved last evening that they are more than equal to Congreve, and players who are equal to Restoration comedy are obviously equal to anything. Reviving "Love for Love," at the Hudson, they stepped nimbly through the most intricate of frivolities, doubled and redoubled all the entendres and wore lacy loveliness of the period's costumes with an air. Nothing more can be done for the comedies of William Congreve, except possibly to leave them in the library.

But not even the most reluctant admirer of Restoration comedy could wish to deny the Players their frolic or wish them anything but well of it. The play is, to be sure, an affair of diligently hand-embroidered epigrams. Valentine's pursuit of his lady, Angelica, is methodical in its strategems and no person over the age of 14 was ever so anxious a seeker after the double meaning as was this bawdy Mr. Congreve. Even in the hands of expert actors the artificial ardencies and the time-fuse wit of "Love for Love" have a tendency to pall. The Players have found several solutions to this problem.

The chief of their solutions is Bobby Clark. Mr. Clark strides in in the nick of time as Ben, who will be remembered by Congreve fanciers as Sir Sampson's seagoing son. Mr. Clark blows through the warm atmosphere like a frolicking west wind. He slaps himself and all within reach. He rolls his eyes and dances hornpipes. He sings songs and makes faces and is several times as ribald as the script and, I think, as many times funnier. His choice for the part—for any part in artificial comedy—is an inspired flight in the face of tradition.

The Players have chased tedium, also, by permitting Miss Peggy Wood to step at intervals from the role of Mrs. Foresight so that she may sing charming songs, and sing them charmingly. They have encouraged Dudley Digges to expand at will beyond the narrow confines of the part of Foresight and make that literary figment into a character. They have let Dorothy Gish turn loose comically as Miss Prue and given Edgar Stehli full liberty to purr in that baleful fashion of his as Tattle. Barry Jones, after some clutching in the opening scene, makes a fine, free-style Valentine, and Romney Brent is, when opportunity allows, an engaging Jeremy. (The play gives Jeremy few chances, unfortunately.) Cornelia Otis Skinner is handsome and gay as Angelica; she and Miss Wood and Violet Heming probably come closest to the spirit of the period. Leo G. Carroll is appropriately languid as Scandal, but his shoulders—and his memory, for that matter—shake under the heavy burden of Congreve epigrams. The production has been beautifully designed by Robert Edmond Jones and delightfully costumed by Millia Davenport.

Walter Hampton speaks a prologue and Otis Skinner made a charming little speech of welcome last evening. It was a pleasant party, and probably we can learn to take a little Congreve now and then. The Players are good teachers, at any rate.

'LOVE FOR LOVE'

Comedy by William Congreve; revived for one week by the Players at the Hudson Theater on June 3, 1940; directed and designed by Robert Edmond Jones; music composed and arranged by Macklin Marrow; costumes by Millia Davenport; prologue and epilogue written by Charles Hanson Towne. The cast:

Sir Sampson Legend	Thomas Chalmers
Valentine	Barry Jones
Scandal	Leo G. Carroll
Tattle	Edgar Stehli
Ben	Bobby Clark
Foresight	Dudley Digges
Jeremy	Romney Brent
Trapland	Herbert Ranson
Buckram	A. G. Andrews
Snap	Paul Parks
Angelica	Cornelia Otis Skinner
Mrs. Foresight	Peggy Wood
Mrs. Frail	Violet Heming
Miss Prue	Dorothy Gish
Nurse to Miss Prue	Daisy Belmore
Steward to Sir Sampson	Jack Prescott
Servant to Foresight	J. Ascher Smith
Sailors	Richard Ellington, Jack Benwell, John Seymour, Neil Skinner

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *June 4, 1940*

Bobby Clark Is a Riot in Love for Love Role

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IN the midst of an exquisitely mannered revival of Will Congreve's broad farce, Love for Love, 15th classic revival of The Players, the eminent Bobby Clark bunged himself onto the stage in the role of Sir Sampson Legend's seafaring son, Ben, and what followed on both sides of the footlights might mildly be described as a riot.

Mr. Clark, for the sake of 17th century realism, had abandoned the painted spectacles and immense cigar which are his trademarks, but he played the part with all the abundant spirit of burlesque, the lusty, gusty, leering magnificence that makes his modern clowning supreme in its field, and the result was one of the most gratifying spectacles that has been seen on our stage all season.

The Players' revival of the old restoration farce, which will be seen at the Hudson Theater for one week, is one of their happiest. Certainly it is memorable, not only for the wedding of the art of Clark to the wit of Congreve, but for the rollicking performances of a cast studded with starred names. I imagine, too, that as this pleasant week progresses the performance of it will grow even better. It is not easy to face such a professionally critical audience as last night's.

* * *

For all practical purposes, the play was left in approximately the same shape as when it left Congreve's pen. One ante-chamber scene which might have delighted the coarser tastes of an audience in 1695 had been eliminated, and some of the broader phrases were deleted or spoken with so little emphasis that they fell harmlessly on these politer ears, but the essence of it was there, and none of its primitive flavor was lost.

Love for Love should not, of course, be weighed by present-day standards, either in regard to its plot, which is impossible, or its morals, which are those of an easier age. It must be accepted for two important truths—that is was an accurate reflection of the society of its days and that it contained vast wit wrapped in the language of elegance. The only other thing that matters in this instance, is how it was played.

Well it was played, under the direction of Robert Edmond Jones, who also designed the magnificent setting (a 17th century drawing room) with vigor, high good humor and the general competence of a skillful, experienced troupe. It was intelligent and, for the most part, so well spoken that even an audience untrained in the more or less archaic English understood it well.

Mr. Clark, home from the sea, put the same ingenuous and frank construction upon his relations with the beautiful ladies who surrounded him in this play that marked his recent appearance in the Streets of Paris. Congreve or no Congreve, he made the part a Clark tour de force, and this was as it should be.

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Dudley Digges, as the maundering old astrological devotee, gave a fine, mellow performance and was happily cast in the part. Thomas Chalmers played Sir Sampson Legend with bold, forthright strokes and made a dominent figure throughout. Barry Jones was superbly polished in his characterization of the lovelorn blade, Valentine. Edgar Stehli, who has never received the attention to which his subtle, incisive characterizations invariably entitle him, was excellent as usual in the role of the dimwit fop, Tattle.

Among those entitled to top ranking, too, was Leo G. Carroll, resembling a 17th century Grover Whalen and giving a finished, compelling performance of Scandal.

The feminine side of the cast was amazingly adept and incredibly handsome. Add the furbelows, the lace, the coiffures, the beauty patches and frills of 1695 to such already beautiful women as Violet Heming, Peggy Wood and Cornelia Otis Skinner, and you can well imagine what exquisite creatures result. Moreover, they romped so gaily and with such abandon through the racy lines that there was never a dull moment in their company.

Dorothy Gish, I think, deserves a little paragraph all to herself. The comedy role of Prue, the country bumpkin, fell to her lot, and in it she accomplished a miracle of characterization. Her final scene was particularly uproarious.

The minor roles were excellently handled, and the not-so-minor part of the servant, Jeremy, was in the capable hands of Romney Brent.

Otis Skinner delighted the audience with a curtain speech, after the first act, that bristled with wit.

This is a notable revival. Warning: You'll have to hurry to get tickets.

"Love for Love"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *June 4, 1940*

The Players Club Revives Congreve's "Love for Love"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN a charming speech Otis Skinner pointed out between the acts at the Hudson last night how different from life as he knows it in his home in Woodstock, Vt., is life as it was lived by the fops and ladies in "Love for Love." Mr. Skinner was as right as he was ingratiating. The Congrevean universe is a special world. Mr. Coolidge's shade stands in no danger of wandering into it. It is the Utopia of gallantry, the cuckold's paradise, the happy hunting grounds of the unprudish. Charles Lamb knew it to be.

Those who trespass past the sign at its gates reading "Danger" have to be sophisticates to survive their visit with impunity and without blushes. Conversation they must prize—not small talk for the sake of gossip, but tattle for all the glories with which a superlative stylist could lighten his innuendos, vary his comments upon infidelity, and in general to dispel the shadows of the alcove, their secrets, thus illumined, became literature.

A Gay World

The hue and cry in Congreve's world is for the double-entendre; the scene that takes serious domestic virtues lightly; the line that never admits the existence of virtue and gets along quite brilliantly without it. Othello would have been maddened by jealousy and committed murder long before the fifth act in such a setting. The people for whom the setting is designed are characters whose manners are too exemplary to indulge in jealousy. They are as innocent of jealousy as they are of scruples.

Polite as they are, they live by their wits. And in their presence we must be prepared to live by their wits, too, no matter how impolite they may be. Hazlitt knew that, though Congreve's characters could all of them speak well, they were machines when they came to act. Correct as Hazlitt was, he overlooked the fact that, if one is really listening to the talk of Congreve's people, there is little time left in which to bother about what, as he put it, is mechanical in their actions. They all of them—the Scandals, the Tattles, the Bens, and the Mrs. Foresights, the Miss Prues, the Angelicas, and the Mrs. Frails—shine like naughty deeds in a not so good world. What is left of their reputations when the curtain first goes up hangs upon a phrase, and only the delight in the phrase survives when they are done with one another.

If they are a bawdy crew, the ladies no less than the gallants, they are nonetheless a delightful one by virtue of their witty amorality. The men are hot-blooded dandies, who, to an uncertain extent, are air-conditioned by the glories of their small talk. The ladies spend their time holding up the flaming candelabra of their conversation to an artificial exposure of their natural frailties.

An Agreeable Revival

If the very effulgence of their prattle, pleasurable as it is, can grow wearisome because of the relentless straining and blinking it invites, its quality has nonetheless been admirably suggested by Robert Edmond Jones in the glittering setting, all mirrors and flashing candles, which first he used in his revival of the same play back in 1925. In more ways than one the mirrors in Mr. Jones's backgrounds are the perfect symbol of the comedy they reflect and of the special world reflected by that comedy. They have an appropriate gaiety and style. Even when Congreve is lagging, they continue to give visual significance to his intentions.

The Players Club has been fortunate in more than Mr. Jones's settings. Its members have been lucky in his direction, too, and are to be congratulated upon their cast. That the women are on the whole better than the men is no doubt only a subtle expression of the Club's gallantry.

Cornelia Otis Skinner is an admirable Angelica. Miss Skinner plays with a genuine mastery of the difficult artificial style. She neither overstresses nor underdoes. Her voice is attuned to the niceties of a conversational elegance and sparkle long since a literary treasure. She acts, moreover, with grace and charm, and perfect co-operation with her fellow players.

Violet Heming is at her topnotch best as Mrs. Frail, making vital and tantalizing every implication in a shamelessly fascinating creature. As the country-bred innocent, Miss Prue, to whom fall some of the comedy's best scenes, Miss Gish gives an excellent performance, insouciant and wittily established in its mock innocence. Miss Wood strains herself trying to subdue her goodness to the wickedness of Mrs. Foresight, and strains the audience by being asked to sing more songs than the traffic will bear.

Barry Jones as Valentine is agreeable enough. Dudley Digges does more than anyone has a right to do as Foresight. Leo G. Carroll and Edgar Stehli (both expert actors) fail to achieve all they might with Scandal and Tattle. But Thomas Chalmers is a valiant Sir Sampson, Romney Brent is an uproarious Jeremy, and Bobby Clark walks away with Congreve (who is quite a person to walk with) as the rough-spoken sailor, Ben. Although Mr. Clark does not wear his painted spectacles, he could not be better even if he did. His footwork remains the same. He functions as a happy dust-blower in a classical library. His comic spirit is something Congreve cannot subdue or alter. Much as one admires Congreve and the Players Club revival of his comedy, Bobby Clark's roistering antics are more than welcome in a world of sustained artifice. They are downright convulsing. The truth is "Love for Love" is not apt to be better revived in our time.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *June 4, 1940*

Players Club Revives William Congreve's 'Love for Love' for One Week With an All-Star Cast

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHAT good-will can do for William Congreve's "Love for Love," The Players are now doing at the Hudson Theatre, where their annual revival was staged last evening. They have rounded up a cast of distinguished actors. Robert Edmond Jones, who designed the Greenwich Village revival of 1925, has contributed a beautiful mirrored setting. Out of loyalty to The Players, Macklin Marrow has composed drawing-room music; Charles Hanson Towne has composed some hospitable verses, and Walter Hampden and Otis Skinner are acting as hosts.

But it will take more than good-will and beauty to make a witty performance out of this relic of Restoration bawdry that survives in the playbooks from 1695. Although the works of Congreve, Wycherley and their scribbling colleagues enjoy high reputations for low morals, they are elaborately tedious in ill-blended performances. The circumstances in which The Players stage their annual revival are not conducive to disciplined acting. Excepting a few good individual performances, this revival is loosely acted without style or idea.

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Let us all be grateful, therefore, to the actors who have pitched into it with spirit or notions of their own. Bobby Clark steals the show. Casting him in a restoration comedy, in which manners are tyrants, is in itself a stroke of genius. Into the midst of mincing tittle-tattle about amorous and financial intrigue, Bobby comes like a breath of fresh air with his music-hall ebullience intact. He is cast as the seagoing son of Sir Sampson Legend, home from voyage and ripe for marriage. But Bobby does not worry about technical details. Wearing short dresses that disclose the illustrious legs of a rare mountebank, Bobby runs around the stage like a comic dwarf and raises some excellent hell.

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It is something also to see what a creative actor like Dudley Digges can do with a silly part. Nothing could be much flatter than the peevish old astrologer he is playing. Foresight, father of the heroine of "Love for Love," is an uninspired fool as Congreve wrote the part. But Mr. Digges dives into the character with the resourcefulness of an enlightened actor who feels at home in any style of drama. His make-up is ludicrously grotesque. He stoops over as though he were burdened by the weight of all the fools in Christendom. He speaks his lines with the puffing and gasping of a man at his wit's end. In Mr. Digges's imaginative and skillful acting Foresight emerges as a fully articulate character and a source of liveliness in every scene he inhabits.

As Angelica, niece to Foresight and the focal point of Congreve's involutions, Cornelia Otis Skinner is giving a lovely performance. Known chiefly for her one-woman shows, Miss Skinner has seldom if ever appeared in this town as one member of an acting company. Her experience in wearing bravura costumes helps her to feel at home in a remote period. Her personal beauty wins friends and influences audiences. In addition to all this, Miss Skinner has a lucid idea about the part she is playing, and she gives the whole performance a sense of structure when she is on the stage.

Although Dorothy Gish is poorly cast as Miss Prue, the ignorant chit of the Foresight household, she plays the part with pithy spirit. Peggy Wood, cast as Mrs. Foresight, sings two or three songs enchantingly. But that about exhausts the pleasure of this dutiful revival of a classic. Although Romney Brent is a superb droll, he does not make much out of the part of Valentine's impudent servant, and some of his associates give very slovenly performances, indeed. Say a word of thanks for Millia Davenport's interesting costumes. But like a good many other things that respectable culture cherishes as priceless, this bit of Restoration drama is moldy stuff.

"Love for Love"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *June 4, 1940*

"Love for Love" Is Revived by Players' Club and Bobby Clark

"Love for Love," comedy by William Congreve. Revived by the Players' Club at the Hudson Theatre, New York, June 3, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Players are having themselves a time at the Hudson Theatre this week, with a revival of Congreve's "Love for Love." I think you would do well to take some part in it. There isn't, it's true, much to thrill you in any of the Restoration comedies. They have little to offer but their graces and their bawdry.

But there is a good deal to satisfy you in the Players' interpretation of the spirit of Congreve's impudence, and the dignified and finished playing of one of the best casts they have yet assembled.

They offer you a little something extra this year, too. Bobby Clark is playing Ben, the rough-hearted sailor son of Sir Sampson. And Bobby, good burlesquer that he is, is turning Ben's part into such a romp as probably even Congreve would never have dreamed possible.

Ben, as you probably do not remember, is the rover, "half home-bred and half sea-bred," to whom Sir Sampson, angry with his spendthrift older son, Valentine, would turn over the largest part of his fortune.

Balky Ben

Ben would like the money, but he has no liking for simple Prue, the country girl who goes with it. His eye is rather for Mistress Frail, the friend of man, and he is not at all hesitant about saying so.

Which gives boisterous Bobby a grand entrance and a half-dozen happy exits, not forgetting a song about Buxom Joan who loved "A Soldier and a Sailor" through three verses and a couple of choruses of amusing confessions.

It is Mr. Clark's exuberance that restores the Restoration when the Congreve dialogues go a bit dull. He is in grand form and is, I think, in for a happy week.

The others are also happily cast, but naturally more restrained. There is Peggy Wood, playing the forgetful Mrs. Foresight, and singing several songs delightfully. Miss is also in particularly good form a voice for this week of celebration.

And Cornelia Otis Skinner, relis of her best character monologue gie performance and playing A dignity that still gives rein to a comedy spirit.

And Violet Heming, relishing the liberties of Mrs. Frail and making that conspiring lady very handsome and properly alluring.

And Dorothy Gish, who adds a touch of the Gish spitfire to the character of Prue that brings that lady from the country definitely into focus.

The Male Animals

The men include Barry Jones, who came to town with Shaw's "Geneva" some weeks back and is nicely fitted to the poses and artfulness of the romantic but unstable Valentine.

Leo G. Carroll has the manner and ease for Scandal, and Edgar Stehli repeats the Tattle he played the season of 1924-25 when Kenneth Macgowan, Robert Edmond Jones and Eugene O'Neill revived "Love for Love" in Greenwich Village.

Thomas H. Chalmers is properly rugged and forceful as Sir Sampson, Romney Brent is a satisfaction, as he usually is, as Jeremy, and Dudley Digges mumbles into his scratchy beard with the perfect uncertainty of the crack-brained astrologer, Foresight.

There are short parts for that beloved veteran, A. G. Andrews, for Daisy Belmore and Paul Parks, not to mention a quartet of dancing sailors and a couple of honest servitors recruited from the club. And Evan Evans lifts his fine baritone in song at frequent intervals.

It is, as said, all jolly and spirited. President Walter Hampden reads a Charles Hanson Towne prologue, Vice President Otis inner speaks a graceful little piece between and Cornelia Otis Skinner obliges with ading of a Towne epilogue.

Players were in force last night. he prices go down so it will go till

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *June 4, 1940*

Restoration Rakes

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

AFTER four years of silence that eminent organization known as The Players has come out of its lair in Gramercy Park to offer us another revival of a dramatic classic. This time, as you have doubtless read somewhere, the revival is of William Congreve's seventeenth-century masterpiece, "Love for Love," a comedy that is almost invariably referred to as "bawdy." Ignoring such an ingenuous epithet, let us rather call it a gay, witty and gracefully artificial excursion into the lives of the Restoration rakes, both sexes, brilliantly written by a distinguished literary artist of the period who knew his way around in such amiable circles. Played with agreeable gusto by a cast of prominent performers, the current version of "Love for Love," affectionately done by all concerned with the production, captures the qualities of a famous, even notorious play with brightness and enthusiasm.

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There are many enlivening things about the revival, not the least of which is the discovery that all those years ago William Congreve was really writing a vehicle for Bobby Clark. Many of the actors emerge handsomely in the artificial, mannered and bantering style of Restoration comedy, but none of them appears as heroically as the great Mr. Clark, who, it seems, can be funny in any century he chooses. Without his splendidly painted spectacles Mr. Clark, you might think, would be helpless, but I can assure you that you are wrong. In the role of Ben Legend, the doughty sailor, who preferred the sophisticated Mrs. Frail to the ingenuous Miss Prue, the eminent musical-comedy comic darts about with high glee and splendid, roaring spirits, and, whether singing a bawdy song of the period, doing a nautical dance or acting away as an amorous tar, he is a complete and constant delight. The only trouble is that, had Congreve known, he would undoubtedly have written a fatter part for so wonderful a clown.

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The style of these brittle, graceful, literary comedies is a difficult one for present-day actors to capture, but under Robert Edmond Jones's knowing direction, the players in the current revival manage surprisingly well. Miss Dorothy Gish, for example, could hardly be improved upon as the country girl, Prue, and Miss Violet Heming manages the proper manner admirably as the dubious Mrs. Frail. Miss Cornelia Otis Skinner and Miss Peggy Wood are also successful in sustaining the required mood, which seems, on the whole, easier for actresses than for actors. The men, however, manage excellently. Edgar Stehli is particularly good as the foolish Tattle, and there are effective portrayals by Leo G. Carroll, Romney Brent, Barry Jones and Dudley Digges, who know their way around in this sort of thing. But all of the performers, from Thomas Chalmers to Herbert Ranson, enter into the spirit of the occasion pleasantly.

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There can be no doubt that "Love for Love" remains a lively, as well as a classic, comedy. I doubt if you will find it particularly shocking, even if you are unduly sensitive to such things. It is too thoroughly literary in its manner to seem really "bawdy," as some of its enthusiasts still insist upon labeling it. But certainly it does indicate that the Restoration rakes were pretty single-minded fellows as they went about their all-important business of tending to their amours. In fact, it seems that the boys and girls of the period hadn't much time to contemplate anything else. While it has wit and grace and comic dexterity, "Love for Love" assuredly does lack a heart, but somehow it seems to do quite handsomely without one. I doubt if it is as alien to our day as its handsome costumes would indicate, and for a great part of the time it is really good fun. Incidentally, the first night was quite a gala affair, with such eminent members of The Players as Otis Skinner and Walter Hampden addressing the audience and the spectators seeming on their best behavior.